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Imperial Federation.

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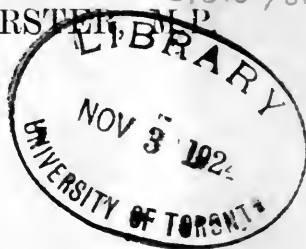


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IMPERIAL FEDERATION

BY THE
William Edward
RIGHT HON. W. E. FORSTER, M.P. (1818-1886)



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IMPERIAL FEDERATION.

WHAT do you mean by Imperial Federation? What is the real object of this Federation League which you and others are forming?

I have been often asked these questions of late, and my reply is, Such a union of the mother-country with her colonies as will keep the realm one State in relation to other States. Purposely I use the word *keep*, and not *make*. I do not say that we are trying by federation to make the empire one commonwealth in relation to foreign Powers, because at the present time it is one commonwealth.

Then why our League? why all this talk and fuss? why not let well alone?

For this reason: because in giving self-government to our colonies we have introduced a principle which must eventually shake off from Great Britain, Greater Britain, and divide it into separate States; which must, in short, dissolve the union, unless counteracting measures be taken to preserve it.

At our last Federation Conference a colonial statesman said, 'We have federation at this moment.' Quite true; Mr. Freeman's definition, which I then ventured to quote, is fulfilled. 'A Federal Commonwealth, in its perfect form,' he says, 'is one which forms a single State in its relations to other nations, but which consists of many States with regard to its internal government.'¹ Without doubt we have this perfect form; but how long can it last? The United Kingdom, the Dominion of Canada, the different Australian

¹ Freeman's *History of Federal Government*, vol. i. p. 2.

colonies, New Zealand, and the Cape, are, it is true, many States as regards their internal government, and they are also one State as regards other nations. But why? Because the United Kingdom keeps to itself, and absorbs within itself, the foreign policy of the whole realm.

There is, indeed, still some semblance of subordination in respect to domestic legislation; but it is only a semblance, for the veto, reserved to the Crown, would not be used except in some extremely improbable, and practically impossible, case; as, for instance, the enactment of slavery. The colonists can tax themselves or educate themselves as they please; they can levy, as we well know, what Customs' duties they think fit; they can pass what marriage laws they like; they have disestablished their State Churches, and can, if they choose, set them up again; they may pass what Franchise Bills or Seats Bills they prefer; they can protect life, and limb, and liberty, and property by what criminal laws or by what police seem good to them; they have power to borrow money, and even to raise regiments of soldiers, and build and man ships of war; but they have no power to modify or participate in the foreign policy which may at any time bring them into war.

Now the real question is, will they continue to submit to this condition of subordination? As regards internal affairs the colonists have self-government. As regards foreign affairs, they are subjects, not merely of the Queen, but of our Parliament—that is, of the inhabitants of the United Kingdom, or rather of such of those inhabitants as are voters.

These two opposing principles—subordination on the one hand, and self-government on the other—we might almost say subjection and freedom—cannot long co-exist. This imperfect, incomplete, one-sided federation must end either in disintegration or in complete and equal and perfect federation.

It is true that as yet there are not many practical difficulties, though signs and symptoms are appearing. Witness the movement in the Dominion with respect to a Zollverein with the States, though I am glad to believe that this movement has less Canadian support than it had; and the recent Australian protests against German and French annexation. Already, whenever and wherever a self-governing colony finds itself damaged or endangered by the action of a foreign Power, it tries to control or modify or initiate the foreign policy of the empire; and we must bear in mind this fact, that the heaven of self-government has not yet had time to fully work. But there is great inconvenience, not to say real danger to peace, in this legal helplessness and powerlessness of the colonies. They try to seize the power of which they are deprived. They attempt, as it were, to right themselves by lynch law; as, for instance, when Queensland hoisted the Imperial flag in New Guinea without

the knowledge or sanction of authorities at home. In like manner, New Zealand threatens to annex the Samoan Islands, regardless alike of Lord Derby and Prince Bismarck.

I am not blaming Queensland for what it has done, or New Zealand for what it may wish to do. To force the hands of our Colonial and Foreign Offices may be the only way of obtaining attention for reasonable claims; but these dangerous modes of assertion would not be tried if they felt that they had an acknowledged voice in the decision of questions deeply affecting their interests.

There is a noteworthy anecdote in the *Croker Papers* just published. When the two old friends met together for the last time, twelve days before the Duke of Wellington's death, Mr. Croker reminded him how, some thirty years before, they had amused themselves in a drive by guessing what was the other side of the hill, and how when he had expressed his surprise at the Duke's guesses being so generally right, he had said, 'Why, I have spent all my life in trying to guess what was at the other side of the hill.' And the Duke stuck to his story, and turning round to Mrs. Croker, he said: 'All the business of war, and indeed all the business of life, is to endeavour to find out what you don't know by what you do; that's what I call guessing what was the other side of the hill.'

I expect we have here the explanation of the moderate Conservatism in his old age of this incarnation of common sense. The Duke, notwithstanding his Tory prepossessions and prejudices, made a shrewd guess that democracy was the other side of the hill. I wish Ministries would guess more than they do. If the late Government had guessed what was at the other side of the hill of the Dual Control, or the present Government what was at the other side of Tel-el-Kebir, we should have had less trouble in Egypt; but forecast is equally needed, and perhaps even more wanting, in public opinion, which nowadays is, after all, our real government. I want, then, our leaders and guides of public opinion to consider what kind of colonial country they will find at the other side of this hill of colonial self-government.

And if we look at this question not merely from the colonial point of view, we shall see how requisite are forethought, and forecast, and preparation in the interests of the voters and taxpayers of the United Kingdom. We do not tax the colonies, but we do defend them, and I rejoice to believe that we shall continue to defend them.

Mr. Chamberlain had good warrant for his declaration at Birmingham that 'the English democracy will stand shoulder to shoulder throughout the world to maintain the honour and integrity of the empire.' The democracy which will rule us in the future will be as ready to defend the rights of their fellow-countrymen all the world over as any monarchy or aristocracy in the past; but the people of the United Kingdom—the electors and elected of the House of Commons—will also feel that their colonial fellow-citizens

must bear their share of the burden of self-defence; nor do these fellow-citizens object to fulfil their duty; they are trying to fulfil it, they wish to bear their share. We see this in the militia regiments in Canada, and in the navies actually formed in Australasia, though I suppose few would deny that these movements for colonial self-defence are partial and incomplete, deficient not so much in expenditure as in system and organisation.

But if we ask the colonies to tax themselves for defence against possible attack from foreign powers, if we remind them that it is not just that we at home should bear more than our fair share of the cost of protecting them from invasion, we must confess that their demand for some participation in imperial foreign policy will gather strength, and therefore again we come to the conclusion that, if the empire is not to be broken up, there must be an organisation for mutual defence and for common control of foreign policy.

This does not imply that such an organisation must be at once and finally defined. Its form will change from time to time according to the increase of the strength of the colonies, whether absolute or relative. The principle of representation has for centuries been the lifeblood of the English Constitution, but it is only now attaining its full development, and in like manner there will be a growth of the principles of federation, though much quicker; for ideas now realise themselves in a year as fully as they used to do in a century.

If, then, I am asked how can the mother-country be kept united with her colonies? I reply, By an organisation for common defence, and a joint foreign policy. And again, to the question, Why not leave matters alone? I reply, Self-government will end in separation if there be no such organisation.

And this brings us to the really important and urgent question, What steps can be taken to initiate or establish this organisation?

But, before discussing this question, there is yet another question which must be admitted to go to the root of the matter, and which is still asked, though not so loudly as in years past. Why take any steps at all? Let the empire be broken up. Be content with training up the colonies to independence. Let them defend themselves, let them have their own Foreign Offices if they wish for such institutions. At any rate, if we must choose between disintegration and such federation as would imply any colonial control of Downing Street, then let disintegration come, and the sooner the better. England was great under Elizabeth, with no Dominion of Canada, no Australasian possessions, no Indian empire; why should not England continue great under Victoria, with Australia and New Zealand and the Cape independent, and Canada annexed to the States, and negro republics in the West Indies and West Africa, and India ruled by Hindoos or Mohammedans? Or, if the future result of separation be not independence; if not only our kinsmen in the

States, but our Continental neighbours Germany and France, apportion among themselves the empire which we throw away—after all, what harm? We shall, at any rate, have attained the result desired by those who wish to get rid of the trouble and cost of colonial responsibilities; as, for instance, my friend, Lord Norton, the keynote of whose article in this Review against Imperial Federation was the necessity of getting rid of the ‘mistaken idea that the colonies, being British, Great Britain must defend them.’²

But it is one thing to have the force and courage which win an empire, and it is another thing to have the cowardice and weakness which lose it. It is one thing to recall to our memory the energy and confidence of England’s youth, and the bold plans and grand aspirings and determined purpose of the Elizabethan heroes; and it is quite another thing to anticipate for our country a premature old age, and to take pride in the prospect of its second childhood.

Some years ago Mr. Millais sent a picture to the Exhibition, than which no picture ever impressed me more: Raleigh as a boy, on the Devonshire beach, looking wistfully over the Western sea, listening to the tales of an old sailor. Raleigh was the chief pioneer of our Colonial Empire and, as thus depicted in his hopeful dreaming youth, he was the true representative of the Elizabethan age. The weather-beaten veteran may be said in some respects to symbolise the England of to-day, with its proud memories of deeds of daring and endurance; but how would the old sailor have scorned the thought that the spirit of English enterprise was to die with him!

And so it is now. England, though old in her history, is youthful in her hopes, and in her confident belief in herself. I do not fear the answer which Englishmen will give to the question, Is the empire worth preserving? The instinct of this age, material as it is sometimes termed, revolts at the thought of disruption. You may call this instinct unreasoning; there are some facts too clear for reasoning. A man who is climbing a difficult peak does not argue within himself as to whether he should clutch the rock above his head, or let himself slide down the precipice by his side. But it will be said this is mere sentiment. Well, sentiment has ruled the world since the world began; and, moreover, history informs us of this noteworthy fact: that, wherever there is a deep and prevailing and powerful national sentiment, there are almost sure to be found strong economical and material grounds in its favour.

Talk of the cost—inveigh against the income-tax which may be needed for a navy strong enough to defend our wide-extended realm. True, an income-tax is an evil, but not so great an evil as no income to tax. More than any other country England’s income depends upon her trade, and statistics prove nothing more plainly than that with us the trade follows the flag, and it is a deduction so clear as to be

² *Nineteenth Century*, September, 1884, p. 516.

almost self-evident, that, if our flag be lowered, our trade will become less.

Emigration is becoming more and more a necessity, not for the working class only, but for all classes. It cannot be doubted that the facilities for a fresh career are already greater in our own colonies than elsewhere; and these facilities admit of great extension and improvement.

Nor must we forget that we are now fed from abroad. It is useless, nay foolish, to lament this fact. It could only have been prevented by stinting the natural growth of our population and starving it down; but I suppose no Free-trader will deny that it is better and safer that our food should be grown as much as possible in our own dominions rather than in foreign countries, with whom, until the millennium, war will be possible; and there is another economical consideration which the least sentimental of politicians cannot afford to ignore. Where should we be without our carrying trade, not merely for the import of our requirements and the export of our manufactures, but for that supply of the wants of other nations, which, by reason of our insular position, has fallen so largely to our share, and by means of which such large numbers of our people earn their living?

Coaling-stations are now necessary to a mercantile marine. Our steamships bring us our luxuries, our comforts, our necessities, our food, and the materials which we manufacture. What coaling-stations would an Elizabethan England have? and where would our steamships be without them? It will mean poverty in many a home, want of wages, and want of food, both because it is dear, and because there is no money wherewith to buy, should England's ships cease to crowd the seas; and they will cease to do so if they lose their colonial harbours for refuge in time of war; if, in short, to put the matter in as few and as plain words as possible, they cannot find well-defended English coaling-stations on every sea.

I think, however, I may take it for granted, that the permanence of the empire is the general, almost the universal, desire of Englishmen; and that if they become convinced, as I think they will be more and more every day, that this permanence can only be maintained by federation, they will universally ask this question, and ask it with a determination to get it answered: What steps can be at once taken to secure federation? How can we develop this temporary, incomplete, one-sided federation so as to give it probabilities of permanence?

For success in this endeavour two conditions are clearly necessary: there must be no attempt to deprive the colonies of local self-government. In the words of the resolution passed by the Federation League: 'No scheme of federation should interfere with the existing rights of local Parliaments as regards local affairs.' And the aspira-

tions of the colonists, their hopes, their national ambition, must be fully acknowledged and considered. Their instinct, their sentiment, their self-interest must be kept on the side of union. They, as well and as fully as we at home, must feel that their future will be stronger, happier, better as members of the British commonwealth than as independent communities.

Bearing these conditions in mind, let us consider what federation proposals have been actually made. They vary greatly, from a Parliament for Greater Britain elected on equal terms by the inhabitants of the United Kingdom and of the Colonies, to a working alliance as described by an Australian statesman in a thoughtful and important article in this Review for last December. Perhaps Mr. Douglas, the writer of that article, may wonder that I claim him as a federationist; but surely a working alliance requires terms and conditions of mutual defence and joint action towards foreign Powers.

But undoubtedly this would be the least possible development of the federal principle, as an Imperial Parliament would be its most complete form. There are two proposals for Parliamentary representation—(1) The admission into the House of Commons of members for the colonies, and probably, at the same time, an addition to the House of Lords of colonial peers. (2) The formation of a new and paramount representative assembly, which shall bear the same relation to our Parliament at home, and also to the Parliaments of the Dominion and of the other colonies, as that which Congress bears to the American State Legislatures, or the German Reichstag to the Prussian or Bavarian Landtags.

In the one case the colonial representatives would sit in a House which would discuss and attempt to solve, not only all imperial questions, but all those affecting the internal government of the United Kingdom; and, in the other case, they would be members of an assembly which concerned itself with imperial questions only.

Now the first of these proposals appears to me impracticable, or at any rate most difficult to work. The colonial representatives might be members of the House of Commons either with or without the power of taking part in home legislation; if they possessed such power, their interference would be looked upon with jealousy; if they did not possess it, their exclusion would be both difficult and obnoxious; and it would not be easy to draw the line between imperial and domestic questions, or to decide when the colonial member should be debarred from voting or speaking.

True it would be possible in theory to avoid this anomalous position; the assembly representing both the United Kingdom and the Colonies might deal with the internal affairs of the Colonies as well as with those of the United Kingdom; but it will be admitted that in practice this arrangement could not work. The colonies would not accept it for a moment, and they would be right in their

refusal, for the large majority of the governing body would have neither the knowledge nor the will to attend to their affairs. In comparison with questions affecting England, or Ireland, or Scotland, those relating to Canada, or Australia, or the Cape would be neglected; or, if not neglected, the Parliamentary block would be intolerable. Neither the present House of Commons nor any possible representative assembly with any possible division of labour would be able to add to the supervision of foreign policy, and the provision for the army and navy, not merely the multifarious subjects for legislation and discussion, every day increasing in number, which affect the relations of the inhabitants of the United Kingdom to one another and to their government, but also similar questions in the colonies with all their varied interests and conditions.

These objections would not apply to the Congress proposal. There is nothing anomalous, or in itself impracticable, in an Imperial Parliament with subordinate Parliaments; but, though it may be the ultimate form of federation, I think at present any attempt to establish it would be premature. This proposal would, I fear, be regarded with some suspicion in the colonies, for populous and rich and powerful as many of them already are, they are yet aware that at present, and for some time to come, they would be dwarfed individually, and even if combined would be weak in comparison with England; and there is no denying that the project would be startling and at first unacceptable to British public opinion. Why, it would be said, force upon us the difficulties of a paper Constitution and State Rights, and the necessity of some tribunal to decide when these rights are infringed or unduly extended?

But a Federal Congress is not the only form of federation, or even of complete federation. It is not, I believe, its most ancient form. At any rate, it was not the form of the League of the United Provinces, or of the Swiss Confederation as at first constituted, or of the German Diet.

I write humbly under the possible criticism of Mr. Freeman—who, by the bye, is long in fulfilling his promise to give us the history of the Federations of Switzerland and the Netherlands—but my impression is that, whereas in the one case the representatives of the different commonwealths deliberate as individuals and decide by the majority of members, in the other case they meet as agents of the different communities, not merely to represent their interests and express their opinions, but also to convey their wishes.

As distinguished from a Congress, we may call this form of federation a Council; and in our realm, under our sovereign, these agents would be at once ambassadors and citizens and subjects. This Federal Council might deal with peace and war, and treaties and negotiations, and also with all questions affecting the defence of the realm, the fortification of its ports and posts, the provision for its army and

navy, the determination of the strength of each service, and especially the respective contributions by each member of the Imperial commonwealth for such defence. At the Federation Conference last November I said I did not think that the time was come, nor that as yet it was necessary for the advocates of permanent union to decide between these two the ultimate forms of federation. I am still of that opinion, though I rejoice to see that there is that impatience of vagueness, that demand for detailed definition, which prove that the minds of men, and of many men, are becoming possessed by the idea of federation, and are determined to realise it.

Lord Grey has repeated in the *Pall Mall Gazette* the suggestion³ which he made in this Review in 1879—viz. the appointment of the agents of the colonies as privy councillors, and their constitution as a Board of Advice to assist the Cabinet, and especially the Colonial Secretary, in the management of colonial affairs; and Lord Lorne has further defined this suggestion⁴ and given excellent arguments in its support. It would be difficult to find any proposal supported by so great a weight of experience as this agreement between the veteran Minister who has an unmatched experience of the Colonial Office, and the man who has just returned from successful government of our largest colony.

Very likely our first step may be the formation of some such Board of Advice, which should bear the same relation to the Secretary for the Colonies as the India Council does to the Secretary for India, with this most important difference, that its members would be chosen by the Colonial Governments. The action which seems to me urgent may lead eventually to either the Federal Congress or the Federal Council; though if the former, it would probably be through the latter. Let us only keep in mind what we want—viz. an organisation for common defence, and an official acknowledgment of the right of the colonies to have a voice in the determination of foreign policy, especially when such policy directly affects their feelings or interests.

As regards defence, present facts show both the necessity for further steps towards federation, and the opportunity which this necessity gives for their being taken.

There are many discussions and disputes about the state of our navy; there are some who assert that the increased expenditure which the Admiralty is now incurring is altogether unnecessary; and there are many who believe it will not meet the requirements of the position; but all will agree in acknowledging this fact, that there are far more claims on the navy than there were.

Every fresh possession that has been added to the dominions of the Queen may at some time need defence. We must have ships of war all the world over to guard the shores of the realm. But our colonists will not deny that the duty of this defence of their

³ *Nineteenth Century*, June 1879, p. 953.

⁴ *Pall Mall Gazette*, Jan. 13, 1885.

ports and cities lies primarily with them, and furthermore, that the protection of our commerce, the safe convoy of our merchant and passenger ships, is their business as well as ours. No Australian sheep-owner will deny that it is his interest to get his wool and mutton to our market; and the merchant who wishes to revisit the old country, or to see his business correspondents, and the successful emigrant who sends money to his brothers or sisters to come and help him in his farm, or to his old parents to live with him in his better home, will feel quite as strongly as we do at home that our magnificent liners must be secured against capture. As regards coaling-stations the case is still clearer. There is here no denial of responsibility. Mr. Douglas tells us that the Australian colonies 'have accepted and have acted up to the recommendations of the Commissioners appointed by Her Majesty's Government in 1878,' and he adds his belief that they would go 'further, and if deemed desirable would form an arsenal and establish factories for war material.' But he doubts 'whether they would contribute to the fortification of Aden or Singapore, essential as these fortifications may be. They would,' he writes, 'probably say, "We will fortify coaling-stations on our own territory, but more than that we cannot undertake at present."' Now I venture to express my belief that, if the matter were fairly and fully brought before them, this would not be their reply. I think they would feel that the safety of the Red Sea route between themselves and England, and even the trade between Australia and China, could not be a matter of indifference to them.

But why not ask them for their opinion? This seems to me one of many kindred subjects which might be rightly brought before the Colonial Governments by the Colonial Secretary. Surely the necessity, admitted to be urgent, of strengthening the defences of the empire affords an excellent opportunity of initiating a Colonial Council, or, if the term be preferred, a committee of colonial representatives. I do not assert or suppose that Lord Derby ignores or disregards colonial feeling or colonial opinion. Probably he has private communications with the High Commissioner and the Agents-General, and possibly he sends private messages to the Ministers of a colony through its Governor; but is not this pre-eminently a matter for official rather than private communication?

It may be said, Why not send an official despatch to the Governor, requiring him to ask the Colonial Premier for an answer? But it would seem to me that this would be the means of communication most likely to obtain a negative reply. We do not want a Colonial Cabinet or Parliament to be forced to say at once aye or no to a proposal, but we want representatives of the colonies to be able, without committing those they represent, to aid one another in discussing with the Home Government such proposals, and after such discussion

to ask the sanction of their Governments to the conclusions at which they have arrived.

Is it impossible for Lord Derby to write to the Queen's representatives at Ottawa, and Sydney, and Victoria, and Adelaide, and Brisbane, and Auckland, and Hobart Town, and Cape Town somewhat to this effect? 'The necessity for recasting the defences of the empire is urgent. Her Majesty's Ministers wish to take counsel with your Government on the steps to be taken. Ask your Ministers to empower their agent in London, or if they prefer it to send some special representative to confer with me and with the representatives of the other self-governing colonies. Your Ministers will not be committed to any course recommended by such Conference until they have been informed thereof and approve.'

There would be no lack of subjects upon which such Conference would deliberate, though its main business would be to decide what should be the fair share of each colony in the provision of defence. The Colonial Secretary would require help. He would probably ask the aid of the First Lord of the Admiralty in arrangements for the Australian navies already formed; whether they should be incorporated with the Queen's navy, and if so, on what conditions of contribution; and if, as I trust, there be this incorporation, with what facilities for engaging colonial sailors, or training and examining colonial cadets, so that a naval career for both officers and men might be fully and fairly opened to the Queen's Australian subjects. The Chancellor of the Exchequer would have to consider on what terms the Imperial credit should be pledged for colonial loans for providing colonial forts and colonial coaling-stations; and I doubt not that, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, he would feel that he was making a good bargain for the British taxpayer if he lent money for this purpose on his lowest terms; and certainly it would not be long before the Foreign Secretary would be called in.

Now surely some such Conference as this would be of immediate and practical use in meeting the colonial and foreign difficulties which beset the Government, and cannot be safely solved without regard to colonial feeling and deference to colonial opinion, and which will be more easily met by colonial aid.

But are we sure that these representatives of the colonies will always support the foreign policy of our Ministers? May they not sometimes thwart it, or at any rate attempt to influence and modify it? Well, and why not? England cannot go to war by herself, unless she cuts herself adrift from her colonies: five millions of Canadians or three millions of Australians have a right to some voice in the question whether they should be at war or not; and it will help to preserve peace if they exercise this right.

I know that there are those who have not this opinion—who, on the contrary, believe that federation would increase the chances of

war. You will, they say, thereby enable and tempt the colonists to drag you into war for their special and selfish objects; and at home you will encourage a vainglorious, aggressive, militant spirit which will lead first to defiance of other civilised nations, and then to mutual jealousy and suspicion, and finally to war. Nevertheless, I believe that there would be less danger of colonial wars, and that there would be an additional guarantee for European peace.

As regards colonial wars, I am glad to find my opinion confirmed by both Lord Grey and Lord Lorne. Lord Lorne gives as one of the chief 'advantages to be derived from the constitution of a Colonial Board or Council, that there would be more opportunity for the colonies to combine to further the views of one of their number, or to declare against any impracticable object, and less danger that any imprudent course should be entered on by any one colony without consultation with others and with Britain; while there would be also more strength for enforcing the wishes of any one colony by opportunity given for others to pledge themselves to assist;' ⁵ and Lord Grey says, 'The English at home would be able to secure support for their opposition to manifestly unreasonable colonial propositions among the reasonable colonial representatives; but,' he adds, 'when the English beyond the sea were unanimous in opposing home policy, there would be a fair presumption that we were in the wrong.'⁶ This Board would, in fact, be a tribunal which would pass judgment on selfish and impulsive and unreasonable proposals, and the necessity that they must be elaborated and defined in order to be defended in conference would have a moderating effect on agitations in the colonies themselves.

Nor would it be in the colonies alone that this moderating influence would be felt, for we at home may catch the war fever in the future as we have often done in the past. I am not one of those who believe that a democracy is more prone to war than an aristocracy or an autocracy. The working-men, who are the rank and file of the army, know that their wages depend on peace, and that upon them the blood-tax must weigh the most; and we may therefore expect them to be averse to war, though rather perhaps opposed to its continuance when the burden is felt than to its beginning. But, after all, the English working-man is an Englishman, with the combativeness of his race, and an apparent insult or aggression, or an appeal for sympathy and help, might strike a chord which would vibrate from Caithness to Cornwall, and raise a war-cry which would test the firmness of the strongest statesman to withstand. For we must remember there never was a great people so exposed to sudden and overpowering influences as will be democratic Britain. Compared with other nations, there are small local differences in occupation or

⁵ *Pull Mall Gazette*, January 13, 1885.

⁶ *Ibid.* January 9, 1885.

social surroundings, and the railway and electric wire weld together the thirty-one millions of Britons, and make them sympathise one with another almost as intimately as did the Athenians of old. On the other hand, though exposed to these sudden influences, we shall have especial power to resist them in the individual independence which is the chief characteristic of Britons, and which makes the British minority the strongest minority in the world. But the time may come when the peace minority may want help; and it would get it from the colonies in a federated realm.

Even such a tentative Council as is suggested, with power of deliberation, but without power of decision, would be an influence for peace. No war could be undertaken without the interests of the colonies being closely affected. We should both want their help, and expose them to danger. But this Council would have the opportunity and the right to express an opinion on any war, and without doubt it would seize the opportunity and exercise the right. And would it not have to be a contest undertaken on very strong grounds which would find support from communities so differently situated as would be the different members of the federated commonwealth? Time and space would tell in favour of peace: distance would make a difference in public opinion probable, and the telegraph would enable this difference to be expressed without delay.

Sir John Macdonald, the Premier of the Dominion, made a very short speech at the last Federation Conference, but there was a passage in it well worth remembering. He said he believed 'that the whole policy of Great Britain was opposed to aggressive war; and in any other war the people of Canada would be ready to take their share of the responsibility and the cost.'

These few words illustrate the twofold guarantee for peace which federation would give. The veteran Canadian statesman hints courteously, but clearly, that our greatest colony would be opposed to a war of offence, but may be relied upon in a war of defence.

Let me point out to the members of the Peace Society that here lies the best hope for their millennium, at any rate so far as this country is concerned. An aggressive war will be made more difficult, its dangers and disadvantages will be made more evident, the arguments against it will be more certainly and more strongly expressed; and as for a defensive war, if the union of the empire be consolidated, and Greater Britain obtains an effective organisation for common defence, where is the nation who would venture an attack?

But, in addition to its effect on our defensive strength and our foreign policy, we must consider the bearing which federation may have on colonial tariffs. It cannot be denied that some of these tariffs are a stumbling-block in the path of the advocates of permanent union.

The high duties levied on our manufactures by some of the colonies, and their protectionist feelings and legislation, have, it must be admitted, a disintegrating effect. I fully believe that, high as are these duties now, they would be higher in disunion. Compare, for instance, the Dominion tariff with that in the United States. But undoubtedly ill-feeling is produced by these tariffs, and none the less so because most of us at home believe that they damage the colonial consumer as much as they do the English producer. Nevertheless I believe there is nothing more certain than that we must leave to the self-governing colonies the power of levying such Customs as they think fit. Nominally the Crown has still the right to veto a Colonial Customs Act, but this is a power which any Minister would be most loth to advise the sovereign to exercise. It might be possible to withhold assent to differential duties in favour of the foreigner and against England; but the right to levy high duties on all imports, even with the object of protection, and not merely for revenue, must be admitted.

Such action can only be combated by argument and persuasion; but would not this Colonial Board of Advice be an excellent opportunity for persuasion? It would be clearly understood and declared that no resolution of the Board could commit any colony until approved by its Government; but the opinion of the Home Government, supported in all probability by many of the Colonial Governments, could not but have great weight in checking protectionist legislation in any colony, and I believe also in furthering Free-trade.

There is much to be said in favour of an Imperial Zollverein. It is a most tempting proposal both to those who care for Free-trade and to the advocates of Imperial union, but the difficulties are manifest. They can only be surmounted by a general policy: either by the universal abolition of Excise and Customs, or by similar Excise and Customs throughout the empire. There must be no indirect taxation, or it must be levied everywhere upon the same articles and to the same amount. I do not think we can expect newly-formed communities to raise their revenue solely by direct taxation, but the abolition of all Customs or Excise except upon intoxicating liquors and tobacco, and the general equalisation of these taxes, would make an Imperial Zollverein possible. It is not easy to overrate the benefits which such a fiscal union would confer, not merely upon the Queen's subjects at home, but upon those over the sea; but I can see no chance of successfully mooted such a project, or of obtaining that colonial assent which is absolutely necessary, except by help of some such Council as I have described.

There are those, however, who object to any immediate action, though they are not unfriendly to our ultimate object, and who think that we may do harm by raising the question of federation, and

that the formation of our League may be not only premature, but prejudicial to our cause.

Why, they say, alarm the colonists and the people of the United Kingdom by asking either one or the other to incur any sacrifices for the sake of union? Why not wait till some colony proposes to depart?

My reply is, I am anxious to avoid such proposal; and though I do not deny that some sacrifices are required, I maintain that they are but slight in comparison to the advantages which both parties will gain. Nothing can be bought for nothing in this world, but the consolidation of the realm can now be bought for little. What is the cost? To us at home, the acknowledgment that our fellow-countrymen over the seas have the right to express an opinion upon matters which may drag both them and us into war; to them, the obligation to consider whether they will not pledge themselves to an expenditure for defence which they have already shown their willingness to incur.

These are the sacrifices required for the formation of a Colonial Board of Advice, or the tentative Council above described. But, if the experiment succeeds, to what may we hope it will lead? At any rate to a saving of cost; not merely to an illustration of the old axiom that union is strength, but also to the proof that union is economy.

Strength in this case means economy, for there is nothing so costly as war, and an organisation for common defence will be both for the United Kingdom and for the colonies an almost certain insurance against war. We shall not have the wish to attack, and we shall be too strong to be attacked. The real danger is not that we may act too soon, but too late; not that action will be premature, but that it may have been postponed too long. If we wish to lose our colonies, we cannot more surely attain our desire than by the continuance of our present colonial policy, or rather by persisting in the refusal to have any policy at all.

It matters little that we talk about the blessings of union and our determination to preserve it, when the only rational explanation of what we do, or rather of what we do not do, is that we expect disunion.

I am not finding fault with the Government. Lord Granville and Lord Derby may have been long in making up their minds what course to take in South Africa or in the Pacific, but they may allege in defence that the country has not known its own mind. The fact is, public opinion, though powerful, requires and indeed expects to be guided. The power of public opinion over all rulers, over kings and emperors, and ministers and parliaments, is the great political fact of this age; but I believe governments, or at any rate our Government, will more and more find that not only in colonial, but also in

foreign, and even in domestic, affairs it is their duty and their interest not to wait on public opinion, but to attempt to guide it. But, however this may be, this halting, half-hearted uncertainty has the worst possible effect in the colonies. They do not know what we mean to do, and not even whether we mean to keep them or not, and so they embarrass us by isolated action.

Queensland had little confidence in British care for Colonial interests or in British sympathy with Colonial aspirations, and so she acted for herself. I read, a day or two ago, a telegram stating that at a meeting in Toronto Mr. Blake, the eloquent leader of the Liberal party in the Dominion, had demanded the power for Canada to make her own treaties. If this be true, it means that Mr. Blake is making a demand which implies disunion, and which would not be entertained by the United States or by any Federation now existing; but would he have made this demand if he knew that the principle of participation by Canada in Imperial foreign policy was admitted?

Again, as regards the irritation caused in Australia by the German annexations, it seems to me to be quite as much against the way they have been made as against the actual annexations. It is not so much that Victoria and Queensland fear the acquisition by Germany of tropical islands in the Pacific, as the fact that they suppose that we at home are leaving them alone with Germany, and letting Prince Bismarck do what he thinks fit.

For my part I am grateful to Prince Bismarck: he at any rate has a policy, and by carrying it out he is forcing us to make up our minds. He has made British public opinion speak out, and I rejoice at the action of the Government at St. Lucia Bay, and at the steps which we may hope they are taking to prevent the annexation of the Samoan Islands by Germany and the New Hebrides by France.

There is only one other objection to which I will allude. The members of the Federation League are told that we have no precedent in our favour; that a world-wide confederation with seas separating its members is a novelty in history. Yes, it may be a novelty; but there is another novelty, and that is the political effect of steam and electricity. This is not the time for alarm at novelties; the air is full of them. The new forces of civilisation are at work, and we in England at any rate are making a new departure. Let us be as little enslaved by precedent in our colonial policy as in our domestic legislation. But there is one feeling which is not new. Patriotism is not a novelty, nor, let men say what they will, is patriotism worn out. Are we the fellow-countrymen of our kinsmen in the colonies? Are we and they determined to continue to be fellow-countrymen? Do we and they love our country and care for its welfare? Do we and they believe that this welfare depends on the maintenance of union, and are we and they determined to maintain it?

These are questions which the new and the old electors of our ancient House of Commons and the voters for the newly-formed Colonial Parliaments alike will have to answer. They are questions which it will be the privilege and the duty of our two millions of new voters to assist in solving. Let these questions be asked by the opponents of federation as well as by its advocates. I do not fear the reply.

W. E. FORSTER.

POSTSCRIPT.

Since most of the above was written, Mr. Murray Smith, the Agent-General for Victoria, has received a despatch from Mr. Service, the Premier of his colony, giving his views on federation.

This despatch has already been published, but it seems to me so important that my readers should look at this matter from a colonial point of view, that I must beg them to reperuse it in connection with the remarks I have made, and for which I cannot but be glad to find so much confirmation from so high a colonial authority.

Mr. Service, writing from Melbourne on the 20th of November, after saying that he wishes to explain the considerations which had influenced him to authorise Mr. Smith, not only to attend the last conference of the Federation League, but to give a general support to the movement, writes as follows:—

The chief of those considerations is the very anomalous position which these colonies occupy as regards respectively local government and the exercise of Imperial authority. In regard to the first, the fullest measure of constitutional freedom and Parliamentary representation has been conceded to the more important colonies; but, as regards the second, we have no representation whatever in the Imperial system. Subjects of this part of the Empire may be deeply interested in the action or, it may be, the inaction of the Imperial authorities, but they have no voice nor vote in those councils of the Empire to which Her Majesty's Ministers are responsible; thus, in all matters in which the exercise of the Imperial authority has interests for them, that authority is, to all intents and purposes, an unqualified autocracy; on the one hand, we are under constitutional government, on the other under an antiquated autocracy or bureaucracy.

The weakness of this position has at times been most disadvantageously apparent, and its humiliation keenly felt. Lately, more especially, when policy of the highest concern to the Australasian colonies has had to be administered by the Imperial Government, we have occupied the position of outside petitioners to the Colonial Office, with scarcely more influence than a county member of the House of Commons. I thankfully acknowledge the courtesy extended by the Colonial Office to yourself, as well as, I believe, to the other Colonial Agents-General; but it is something more than concessions of courtesy that is needed. Colonial interests are sufficiently important to entitle us to some defined position in the Imperial economy—to some tangible means of asserting, if necessary, our rights.

It may be difficult to say in what way so vast and scattered an Empire can be federated; but any scheme that may be decided upon, while it cannot take from us anything that we at present possess, must give to the colonies more tangible influence, and more legal and formal authority, than they have now. I, therefore, had no hesitation in directing you to give a general support to the idea, guarding, of course, our local self-government.

A further consideration is that Victoria, and I am sure Australasia, is and always has been heartily loyal both to the Throne and the Empire—a national sentiment which has never failed to express itself on every suitable occasion. The notion, before now openly propounded by Professor Goldwin Smith and others, of disinte-

grating the Empire by cutting off the colonies, has, I am persuaded, little sympathy from Australasians—nor is this altogether a matter of sentiment ; but we believe that the colonies, justly and wisely governed, may be tributaries of strength to the parent State ; that they and it may be mutually recipients of numberless advantages. I am sure that I speak the mind of the colonists generally in expressing our desire to remain, as now, an integral portion of the Empire ; and it is in this view, therefore, that I desire to support the movement for Imperial Federation.

I have the honour to be, Sir, your most obedient servant,

JAMES SERVICE, Premier.

A FEW MORE WORDS ON IMPERIAL FEDERATION.

THERE has been so noteworthy a progress towards Imperial Federation during the last month that I venture to add a few words to those which I wrote on the subject in the last number of this Review.

No one can deny that the present outlook is dark and stormy. This is a time of trial for the strength and virtue of Englishmen; but these times of trial have not been few or far between in our history, and as before, so now, England will face her dangers and surmount her difficulties. I have hope for my country, because I have faith in my fellow-countrymen. Yet there is ground both for sorrow and anxiety. We have lost our beloved hero, and many of our bravest men; we are engaged in a dangerous and most costly enterprise; the strain upon our army and our navy is severe; and the great Powers of Europe, with the exception of Italy, who has shown that she has not forgotten who was her disinterested friend in her time of need, appear to be considering what advantage they can obtain from our difficulties.

But there are two rays of sunlight across the dark prospect. Our soldiers and sailors have given clear proof that they have the endurance and courage and devotedness of their fathers. This is no new fact, though it is well that other nations should at this crisis be reminded that it is a fact with which any enemy of England will have to reckon; but there is a new fact, and that is, that our colonial fellow-countrymen have proved that they are not only willing but longing to take their share in the defence of our common country. I never doubted this willingness, I was sure that it would be shown; but there is not much heed given to expectations or prophecies until they are realised, and therefore I cannot wonder that these offers of colonial aid have struck the British public with pleased surprise.

A day or two before these offers were made known, a speech was made by the ablest and most respected of the opponents of Federation.

It is to me most painful to differ from Mr. Bright, but I expected his opposition, because in one respect he is the most conservative

of our statesmen. There is no man with any mental power approaching to his to whose mind a new idea has such difficulty of access.

But what did Mr. Bright say on the 29th of January at Birmingham?—‘The idea,’ he said, ‘in my opinion is ludicrous that the British Empire—that is, the United Kingdom with all its colonies—should form one country, one interest, one undivided interest for the purposes of defence.’ ‘They’ (that is the Federation League who proclaim these ludicrous notions) ‘must be blind to the lessons of history.’

Yes, but history teaches many lessons now-a-days, and they follow so fast one upon another that it is not always easy to learn them. It may be well for us all, Mr. Bright included, to study this last lesson of history. The Governments of the Dominion of Canada, of New South Wales, of Victoria, of Queensland, of South Australia, have declared that the United Kingdom, with all its colonies, do form one country for the purposes of defence. They have made this declaration on behalf of their people by the offer to give, not only their money but their men, for the defence of the Flag in a war of more than usual danger and privation, and their people have supported their Government in these offers with patriotic enthusiasm.

The union of the mother-country with her children is, thanks to this patriotism, more close and more intimate than it was a month ago.

But is there more probability of its being permanent?

The advocates of disunion, or perhaps it would be more fair to them to call them the believers in necessary disintegration, will tell us that this colonial enthusiasm is a temporary caprice, or at best but a passing feeling, on which no reliance can be placed. I am content to ask those who hold this view to learn the lessons which history will teach them; but may I venture to say one word to the friends of Union? Some of them may perhaps think that this action of the colonies affords an opportunity of securing the permanent unity of the Empire by the immediate elaboration and definition of a scheme of Federation. I would rather venture to say that this colonial action would seem to show that the time has not yet come for such definition, and for this reason, that no scheme which could now be devised, and no system which could now be defined, would adequately express the feelings in men’s minds.

The idea of the permanent unity of the realm, the duty of preserving this union, the blessings which its preservation will confer, the danger and loss and disaster which will follow from disunion, are thoughts which possess the minds of Englishmen both here and over the seas. These thoughts are expressing themselves in deeds; let this expression continue; at present it helps our cause far more effectually than any possible scheme. Events march quickly in these times. Last month I gladly supported Lord Grey’s and Lord

Lorne's proposal of a Colonial Council or Board of Advice, composed of delegates from the self-governing colonies, but I rejoice to acknowledge that the colonies have now taken a step in advance of a Board of Advice.

The Queen has lost no time in expressing Her Majesty's 'warm and grateful feelings to the colonies for their proffered aid;' and thanks for all the offers have been given in fitting terms by Mr. Gladstone, Lord Granville, and Lord Derby, and by the Duke of Cambridge as Commander-in-Chief.

But the only offer which has been actually accepted has been that made by New South Wales. I think this is a mistake. If for military reasons it is desirable that the departure of the expeditions from the other Australian colonies and from Canada should be delayed, I cannot but think that, instead of informing the respective Governments that the Imperial Government would take their offers into consideration if the Soudan war lasted till the autumn, it would have been better to accept these offers at once, while adding that definite instructions would be sent out with regard to time.

Who expects that the Soudan War will be ended before autumn?

Are we sure that our forces will not need strengthening elsewhere than in the Soudan?

The colonies, as I have said above, have taken a step in advance of a Colonial Board of Advice; but it may be that the Queen's subjects both at home and in the colonies will soon call upon the Queen's Ministers to take a still further step.

The evidence of colonial patriotism may ward off the dangers which exist, but on the other hand those dangers may increase, and it may soon become clear that Englishmen throughout the Empire must rally their forces in defence of themselves and of their common country; and there may well be an irresistible demand both at home and in the colonies for a special conference between the Imperial Government and the Colonial Governments in order to resolve on the organisation of this defence.

This therefore does not seem to me to be a time to postpone the acceptance of any colonial offer of assistance, and merely to state that such offer may be taken into consideration.

Let me mention another recent and encouraging event. No offer of military aid in the Soudan has come from South Africa, nor could such offer have been expected. The Queen's subjects in South Africa have their own work to do at present, but in no part of the Queen's dominions has the determination to maintain her realm unshattered been more clearly shown.

The Cape Colonists, not only of English, but many also of Dutch descent, have supposed that England did not care to keep a South African colony, but only a naval station on the road to India and

Australia. I will not now discuss how far this supposition was warranted by the action or inaction of our Government. Public opinion in England has clearly declared that this supposition is a mistake; but, at any rate, it has served this good purpose; it has called forth the most unmistakable demonstrations of loyalty and of patriotism. This has been shown by the pained indignation with which the notion of English desertion has been received in the colony, by the hearty welcome to Sir Charles Warren, and by the eagerness of volunteers to assist him in Bechuanaland; and by the formation of a powerful and influential association, which, under the name of the Empire League, has held enthusiastic meetings throughout the colony, for the purpose of maintaining the unity of the Empire.

The Federation League has gladly welcomed the offer by this association of affiliation, for, though the names may be different, the aim and principles of the two Leagues are the same. We have thus the most encouraging evidence that Canada and Australia and South Africa have not only no wish for separation, but are prepared to make sacrifices for its prevention; and yet there are disintegrating influences still at work. Do not let us blind ourselves to this fact, but that it is a fact is mainly the fault of us at home.

I rejoiced to read some words spoken a few days ago by the Under-Secretary for the Colonies. Mr. Evelyn Ashley stated at the dinner of the London Chamber of Commerce that the offers which the colonies have made 'of their gallant sons as soldiers for the mother-country realised that Federation was an accomplished fact.'

This is perhaps too strong a statement, though it is most encouraging to find it made by the representative of the Colonial Office; but the fact that is realised is, that the colonies are doing their part towards Federation. It remains for us to do ours.

I will not now repeat the arguments by which last month I endeavoured to show that two conditions must be fulfilled in order that England and her colonies should be permanently consolidated in one realm. The ultimate form of Federation must secure not merely co-operation in defence, but participation in foreign policy.

Mr. Ashley added to the remark I have quoted, that all that we have now to do is 'to clothe this new embodiment of Federation in the garb of formality.' But as yet there has been only the embodiment of the colonial willingness to bear part of the burden of common defence. What is now wanted is the embodiment of our willingness to give them participation in that policy which may involve them in war, and which must often most closely affect their interests.

There is an especial reason why the offer of Australian support should at this time be received with gratitude, and that is, that it is made at a time when the Australian colonies have felt themselves aggrieved by the action of our Government in regard to actual German and possible French annexations.

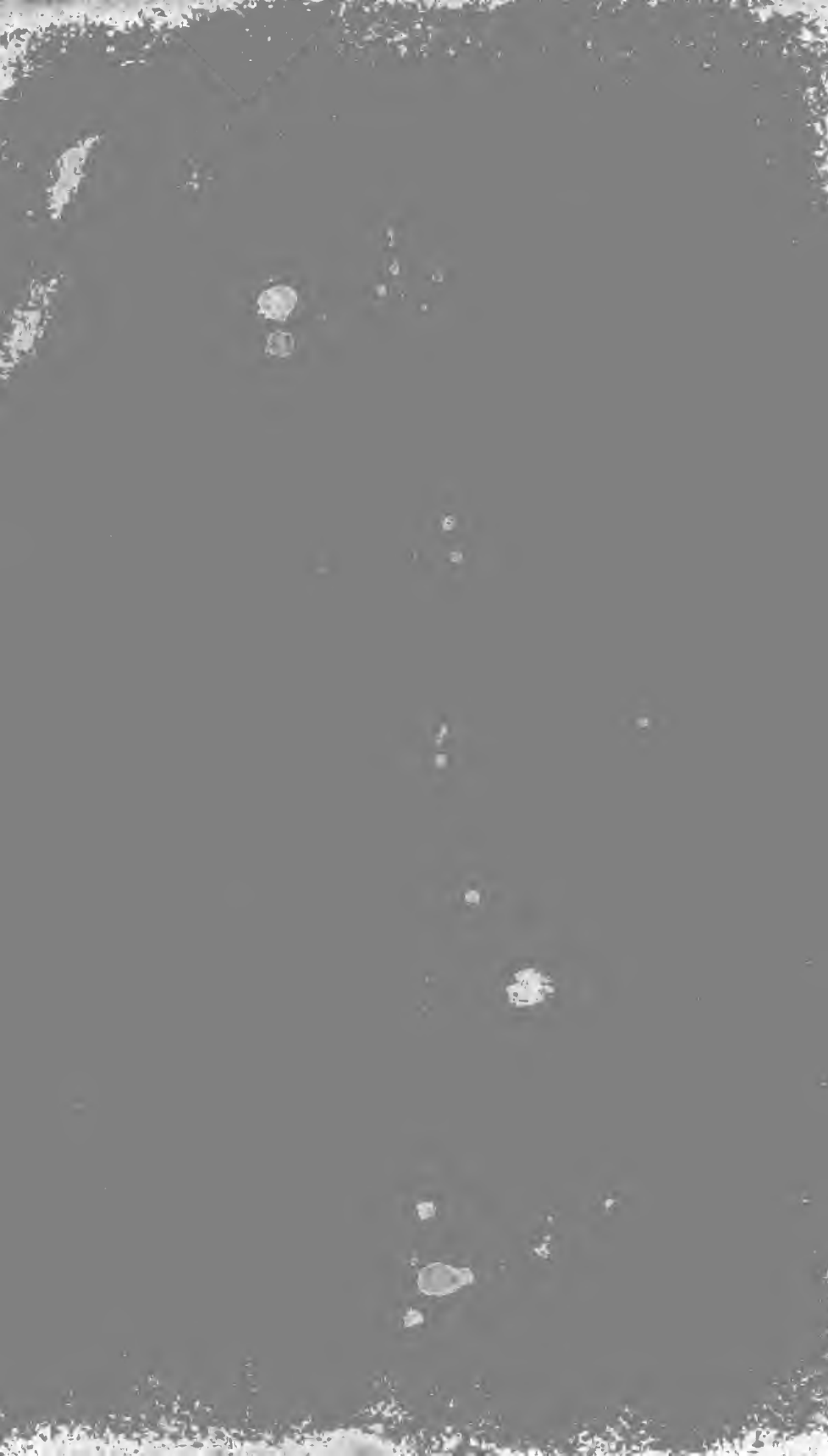
I will not now consider how far this aggrieved feeling is justified by facts, but this much I think is evident, that it would not have existed, or would have been much less prevalent, if the Australian Governments had been taken into closer counsel, and at an earlier period.

That this was not done is not so much the fault of the present Government as of our colonial system.

I am not now pressing for a formal scheme of consultation with the self-governing colonies on foreign policy. It may be, it probably will be, best that, as in defence, so in foreign affairs, deeds should precede words; but no Cabinet will in future allow that either Foreign Office etiquette or Colonial Office traditions shall make it possible for the Imperial Government to pledge itself to any foreign Power upon any matter seriously affecting any self-governing colony without previous consultation with the representatives of such colony. May we not then hope that this year of 1885, which has opened so sorrowfully and so anxiously, may be the beginning of a new and glorious chapter in the records of our country, and may mark the era at which history will have declared the true meaning of the British Empire?

W. E. FORSTER.











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